



For five years American Fork has been sending out a community survey to its residents with the intent to gather direct input from residents regarding their priorities and opinions. Resident feedback is essential to improving our operations and the survey results are taken very seriously.

While it may seem like changes some residents want still are not happening, the city is making important improvements within our limited resources based on survey feedback. This article is designed to go through some of the findings of the survey and what American Fork City has done with those findings.



Citizens Want to Know: COMMUNITY SURVEY

SURVEY DESIGN

Before diving into some of the data it will be important to take a minute to manage expectations regarding this survey. The city does not have any statisticians on its payroll nor does the city pay to have a third-party company conduct or evaluate the survey. The survey is created inhouse by staff with basic statistical knowledge. We fully admit there are better questions we could ask or better analysis we can do. We are always looking for ways to improve the efficacy of the survey. But even with the short comings we have found the results of our survey very helpful in understanding the priority of our residents.

The survey is designed to be as short as possible, typically 12-13 questions. The average respondent typically spends about 4 minutes completing the survey. This is done intentionally to increase the number of respondents as more are willing to take a shorter survey than a longer one. Where possible we try to give close-ended questions (i.e., questions with set responses to choose from) as they are much easier to analyze than open-ended questions. The drawback is that sometimes a respondent's desired response does not fit within the pre-defined answers. When we feel it's needed, we may add a comments section to a particular question. Regardless, we always make sure to include a general comments questions at the end of the survey. These comments are also read by council and staff, though they are not typically shared with the public; partly to protect privacy, partly because some content is not appropriate.

The survey is done through a software called Survey Monkey and is primarily offered online. Of the 1,712 total responses this year, 1,362, or 80%, were submitted electronically with the remaining 20% being completed on physical copies of the survey. A link to take the survey online was emailed to every utility account that pays electronically while physical surveys were mailed to every account that receives printed utility bills. Additionally, the city promotes the survey on our website and on social media and provides physical copies of the survey in most all public facilities in the month of December. All survey responses are safe, secure, and anonymous.

Citizens Want to Know: COMMUNITY SURVEY

BIASES

American Fork's Community Survey is a longitudinal customer satisfaction survey. Customer satisfaction surveys are not intended to be statistically representative of the population. Rather they are intended to elicit feedback from any and all customers who wish to give it. As such, the results are skewed towards those that have a particular motivation for taking the survey. For example, those who are particularly satisfied or unsatisfied might be more inclined to take the survey. Even though our survey is not trying to represent our population, the data shows that our respondents are fairly representative of the age distribution of the United States and Utah (See FIGURE 1).

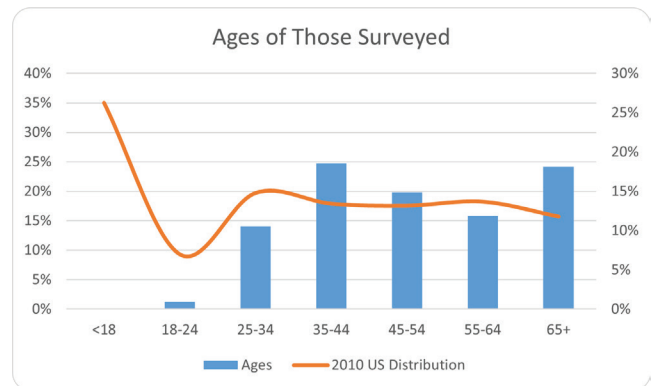


Figure 1- Age Distribution of those surveyed compared to the 2010 US census.
https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-national-detail.html#par_textimage_98372960

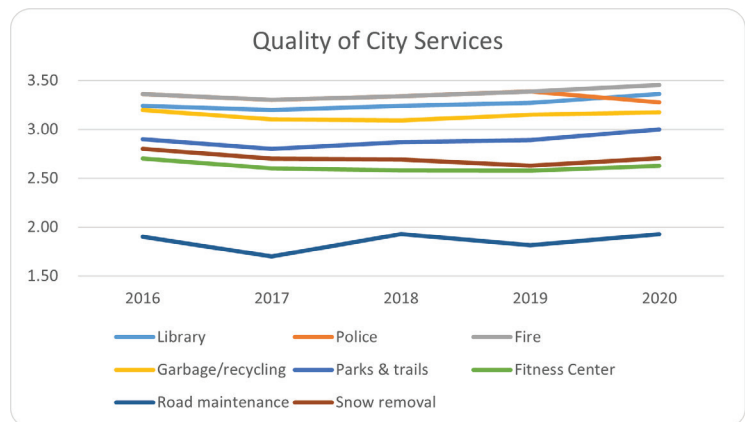
One variance is those under 18 which make up a large part of the US population, but who would not likely take our survey which is directed towards adult homeowners. Another variance is a disproportionately high number of 25-34 ages and 65 and older compared to US data. The 25-34 age group makes sense it matches the median age for American Fork, which is 28 (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/americanforkcityutah>). Additionally, the higher number of respondents 65 and older is also understandable. Data has shown that the older population are more likely to receive a paper utility bill, and thus a physical survey. Our data has also shown that we get a higher response rate from mailed surveys than from emailed online surveys.

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BIASES

Some who have taken the survey more than once may have been frustrated to see we have asked the same questions repeatedly. You may ask yourself, “If I already answered the question last time what is the point of taking the survey again?” These questions are intentionally repeated as part of our **longitudinal research**. Longitudinal studies are when you analyze repeated observations of the same variables over a period time. For example, when we ask every year for you to rate our customer service, we

are not just seeing what the score is for that year, we are also comparing that score to those of previous years to see if we are improving over time. In FIGURE 2 we see the ratings for Quality of City Services over the last 5 years. We have been happy to see that these ratings, scored out of 4 points, have been increasing slightly over time (2016 average was 2.84 and 2020 average was 2.94). While we still have room for improvement, it is good to see we are heading in the right direction.



The **survey sample size** is the last criteria worth considering. With a population size of about 30,000 we would need a sample size of about 1,030 to have statistically significant findings (assuming 95% confidence level and a 3% margin of error). Our 2020 survey had 1,712 and our 5-year average is 1,500 so we feel we are receiving a statistically significant sample size. The confidence level represents the true percent of the population who would pick an answer within the margin of error. The margin of error is the variance expected if we asked our questions to the entire city population. For example, for the first question regarding quality of life, we had 32% say they had an excellent quality of life. To be technically correct we would say we are 95% confident that between 29% (32-3) and 35% (32+3) of our population would classify their quality of life as excellent.

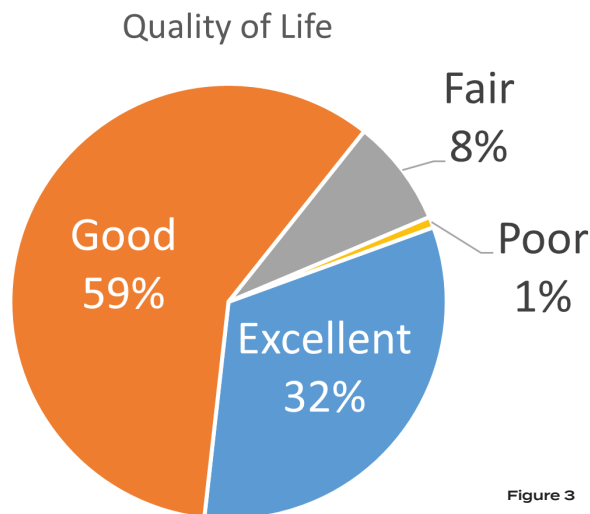
Citizens Want to Know: COMMUNITY SURVEY

SURVEY FINDINGS

Every year we post the survey results on our website at americanfork.gov/survey. But we have not typically added any context or explanation for many of the questions. We will try to do so below.

QUALITY OF LIFE

A perceived positive quality of life among our residents is crucial to our city council and staff. Quality of life is tied to positive attitude which can improve health, life span, and resistance to depression and distress.* For these reasons we are happy to see that 91% of our residents claim at least a good quality of life and one third claim an excellent quality of life (see figure 3). Now we fully acknowledge a lot goes into a person's perceived quality of life, much of which has nothing to do with the City. But it's important for us to understand the sentiment of our community to know best how to serve them.

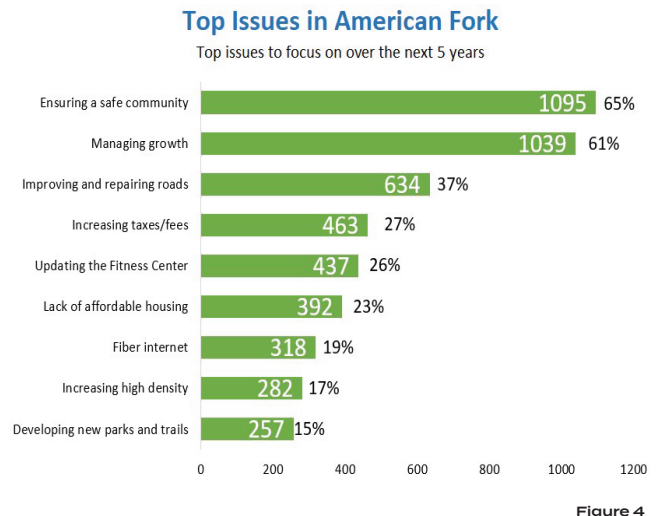


REASONS TO LIVE IN AF

From asking residents why they live in AF we have discovered our location is one of our strongest assets. Our proximity to the mountains, the lakes, other major cities, schools, and even family are a huge value to residents. American Fork has always been considered Hub of Utah County and this data supports that statement. Everything people enjoy is accessed through American Fork and we have been able to capitalize on that by staying connected while remaining a safe community (second reason for living in AF this year). From these findings we hope to plan programs and growth that can facilitate a safe family life for our residents.

TOP ISSUES IN AMERICAN FORK

For the first time in five years the number one issue among those surveyed was not roads. Rather the top issues were ensuring a safe community and managing growth (see figure 4).



We have no pretense that roads are no longer important, but considering the recent social unrest throughout the nation it's no surprise to see that people want to live somewhere safe. And with the insatiable demand for housing in Utah it's no wonder that those who are already settled in American Fork are worried about the effect of growth on the city's identity. Finally, last year we spent an unprecedented and unsustainable \$3.28 million on roads and perhaps some residents noticed it, satisfying their feeling that we are not doing enough on roads.

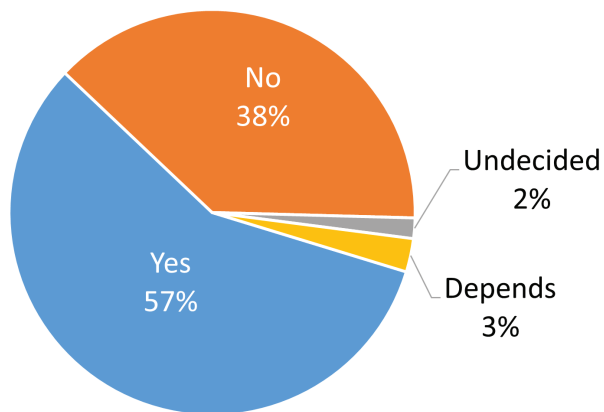
Regardless of how it happened, it is clear that safety and growth have become big issues for our residents. Staff and council are mindful of these concerns and strive to strike the balance between developer's demand for development and maintaining the characteristics that make up American Fork. Ultimately, it's property owners and developers that choose to develop open space, not the City. But the City can help by ensuring a proper mix of uses and densities to provide opportunity for everyone while still preserving what makes American Fork unique.

Citizens Want to Know: COMMUNITY SURVEY

FIBER

With many more people working from home due to COVID we wanted to see if fiber internet for our residents was still a service we should explore. The results of the survey were positive with 57% of respondents feeling this was worth exploring and another 3% saying they would be open to it with certain conditions. In reading the comments it was clear that some were confused and thought AF Connect was already a city run internet, which it is not. AF Connect stands for American Fiber Connect and is privately owned and operated. From these findings the city will continue to look for a solution that provides the desired services in a way that satisfies most residents.

Should the City Explore Fiber Internet Options?



ROAD FUNDING

Road funding is a particularly important survey question as both residents and city council agree road management is an issue that needs to be addressed. Typically, the city has two real options to fund roads, cut expenses (services) or increase revenue (taxes). Running more efficiently is a third option that we are always exploring but it is unrealistic to expect we can come up with enough money to fill our funding gap from efficiencies alone. Unfortunately, cutting expenses is difficult as we have only seen an increase in demand for services. Our recreation programs are typically at capacity and a quarter of our respondents said updating the fitness center is one of their top three issues in American Fork. Library circulation is increasing every year and parks are needed on the south side of town. Finally, in our 2018 survey 64% of those surveyed said they were willing to pay more for additional or better services.

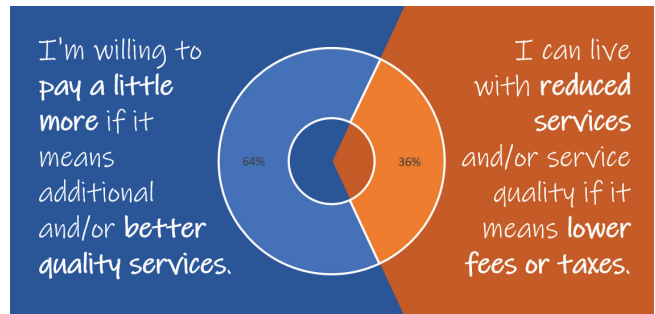


Figure 6- 2018 survey result regarding desires for more/improved services.

The 2018 survey findings regarding services becomes more intriguing when compared to this year's survey where we ask if people would be willing to spend more on one particular service: roads. According to this year's survey, just over half (53%) said they would not support a utility fee or dedicated tax specifically for roads. This seems to be opposite to the 2018 findings. While we don't know for sure why they differ, we can offer a couple ideas. It could be that people are willing to pay for services other than roads, perhaps because residents more readily see the value of the services that directly impact them, like library, rec programs, or parks. Perhaps it could be that roads have a particular stigma among residents as a poorly managed problem in the past that they do not feel can be properly fixed in the future. As such they are hesitant to fund that service, even though they see it as the biggest problem in the City. Whatever the reasoning, American Fork's mayor, council and staff are committed to working with residents to understand the issue and determine a solution.

Would you support a utility fee or property tax increase specifically for road improvements?

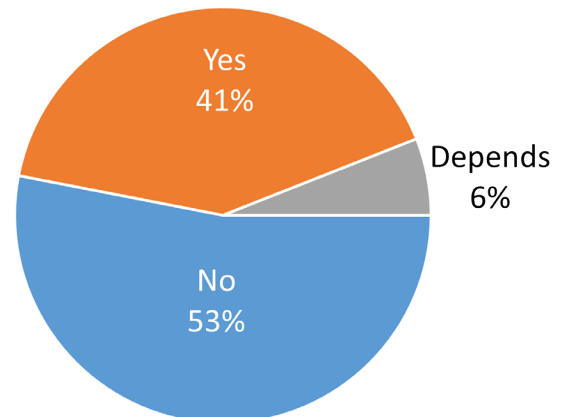


Figure 7 - Just over half would not support additional funding for road maintenance.

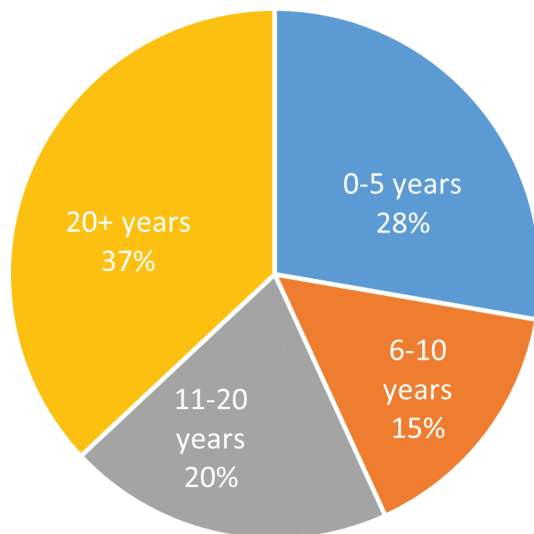
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DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic questions are an important part of the survey because they provide context by helping better understand who is taking the survey. From the survey we can tell that most respondents have been in American Fork for more than 20 years or less than 5 years. Most respondents plan to stay in American Fork indefinitely. Most respondents are from the north side of the city and most respondents are between 35-44 and 65 and older.

We keep the survey demographics in mind when reviewing the other survey questions. For example, most respondents are from the north side of American Fork where there are largely established single family homes. How might that influence the opinion that “managing growth” is one of the top issues? Would the opinion change if we had more respondents from the central or southern parts of the City? Another example is the question regarding time lived in American Fork. This question shows us there is a large divide between residents who have lived here for a long time and residents who are new. The fact that the 0-5 years segment has remained one of the highest segments over the last 5 years of the survey without transitioning to the 6-20 year segments tells us this segment is transitory, meaning the people making up this segment cycle through frequently. If that is the case then we have a large population of people that remain relatively new to the city and typically only stay for 5 or less years. What needs do those people have and how do they fit into the identity of American Fork?

How long have you lived in AF?



OUTCOMES

The decision to provide a community survey started five years ago in 2017. The survey is normally open during December, data is entered and analyzed in January, and presented to staff, city council, and the public in February/March. Every year the Mayor and City Council meet to review the current budget and discuss the future budget needs and constraints. One of the first items on the agenda for this meeting is to review the findings of the community survey. During this time council and staff look at how services are rated over time, top issues and concerns held by the public, and what changes need to be made. The City has made many decisions based on information provided from the surveys. From previous surveys the City has decided to broaden its communication methods to improve our market reach. While we haven't solved our road funding problems yet, we have developed a road and infrastructure plan based on the survey to help us better identify road issues and costs so if/when we do get additional funding we can use them as efficiently as possible. Finally, based on survey results we are also conducting a study of our fitness center to see what improvements we can make to the existing building and operations.

The survey has been a valuable tool for American Fork City and we are forever grateful to our residents for taking the time to complete the survey each year. We will continue to try and improve both the quality of the survey and the analysis of the results. Honest constructive resident feedback is always valued and sought after.



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